

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

VOLUME XXI

ASHLAND, O., WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28, 1899

No. 25

Weak Churches

Dr. Joseph Parker, of London, lately said of what are called weak churches: "I connect all churches with the Christ, the Lord and Sovereign of the universe, and thus I clear the air of all unworthy epithets. To some the conception may seem too metaphysical and far inward. But unless we are right metaphysically we shall never be right practically. Men get wrong in epithets, and then they get wrong in practice. I refuse to speak of small or weak or isolated churches. Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them. With him we shall never be weak or small or isolated. Loudly and fervently I would proclaim that small churches, weak churches and isolated churches are impossible."

The great preacher has a way of getting at the heart of things which the above paragraph notably illustrates. There is very much needless discouragement among the so called weak or small churches, and this discouragement is the most discouraging feature of their situation. It is said that satan, rejecting all other propositions, decided finally that the best way to paralyze the efforts of a certain good man was to discourage him. The members of a so called weak church, and perhaps the pastor also, become discouraged. You hear them say, "There is no material here to build up a church." The "two or three" are there to be sure, and the promise of Christ to be in the midst stands unrepealed, but discouragement hangs over the minds of the brethren like a cloud, shutting out the consciousness of the Master's blessed presence. Besides this discouragement argues unbelief, and our Lord cannot do "many mighty works" where unbelief prevails. The few members sit around with faces long enough to measure dry goods, and this feeling of gloom is communicated to outsiders, and then the church is weak sure enough. Men are not attracted by melancholy. They will hesitate to join a church which acknowledges itself to be forsaken and defeated. A single discouraged member is like the fly in the precious ointment; but suppose the pastor is discouraged, and shows it. In that case the church is dark enough to light lamps. He may look in vain for additions. Men can get enough discouragement and defeat in the world without going to the church for it. They expect help from the church, encouragement, inspiration, gladness, victory. Woe is the church which cannot offer all this to the longing, and hungry, and hunted

soul. We will all say that Dr. Parker is right. Where Christ is, there can be no weak church. No church is small where Christ is at the head. God does not *count*, he *weighs* men. The little church of twelve, filled with the Holy Ghost, each member conscious of the Divine presence, unwavering faith in the person of the risen, triumphant Christ, resting on the indisputable fact of the resurrection, was stronger and mightier than Rome in all her grandeur and magnificence. Numbers are not a test of truth; if they were there never was a time when falsehood would not have been enthroned and right and truth in exile or at the block. Numbers are not a test of moral or spiritual strength; if they were the kingdom of truth would be going backward instead of forward. Three hundred selected Spartans under the leadership of Leonidas, met and hurled back the ten thousand immortals and well nigh annihilated an army of a million men. The truth is the strength of a church is not measured by its numbers, but by the fullness of the Christ-life in each individual member. A church without Christ is nothing less than nothing, though you may count its members by the thousands; a church with Christ is everything, whether there be few or many. Many a local congregation of fifty members exerts a greater moral influence, more Christian and aggressive power than others of ten times its size. Ten men, inspired by the love that is divine, fully trusting in Christ as their Savior and leader, wholly consecrated to the service of the Master, whose hearts are aglow with the flame of a holy enthusiasm, are a greater army with God than as many thousand who have lost the art of prayer and by their worldliness have driven Christ from their ranks. The student of church life goes deeper than the glory of numbers and inquires into the quality of the religious profession, the spirituality that marks it, the zeal and fervor manifested, and the actual influence exerted upon the community. The fact is, that church is the strongest, whether large or small, which has the most of Christ's doctrine and life in it. Mighty is that church where the Master makes one of the members, mighty in joy, mighty in converting power, mighty in pulpit and mighty in pew. Realizing his divine presence,—and remember that presence is not external but internal,—joy and victory light up the faces of the beloved, and the unconverted will say, Here is the salvation promised. This is the redemption, the door of hope and the gate of heaven.